



Press release

Local Pediatricians Urge Collaborative Decision-Making About Reopening Schools

PASADENA, CA (June 2, 2020)

As pediatricians, our top priority is the health and safety of our children. We urge those in public health and education to work together to strike the right balance between preventing the spread of COVID-19 and providing children with the education, nutrition, physical activity, and mental health benefits provided through the reopening of schools.

The risk of COVID-19 transmission among groups of children has not been well-studied, but current research suggests that the risk is much lower than the adult population. The negative effects of missing in-person educational time as children experience prolonged periods of isolation and lack of instruction, however, is clear. Children rely on schools for multiple needs, including but not limited to education, nutrition, physical activity, socialization, and mental health. Special populations of students receive services for disabilities and other conditions that are virtually impossible to deliver online. Prolonging a meaningful return to in-person education would result in hundreds of thousands of children in Los Angeles County being at risk for worsening academic, developmental and health outcomes.

Because of the nature of COVID-19 and of Los Angeles County, we cannot implement a one-size-fits-all set of rules for reopening schools. Los Angeles County covers more than 4,700 square miles and has a population of more than 10 million. Schools must have the flexibility to implement intermittent closures, phased reopenings, and isolation protocols that are appropriate for their specific areas and their specific populations.

“Our concern is that recently issued guidelines for schools re-opening in Los Angeles County are not realistic or even developmentally appropriate for children,” says Dr. Alice Kuo, President of the Southern California chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. “For example, wearing masks throughout the day can hinder language and socio-emotional development, particularly for younger children.”

“The guidelines need to be flexible for different age groups within a school district,” says Kuo. “They also need to take into account what is feasible for the most number of students to return to in-person education, including practical spacing measures.”

The AAP encourages collaborative decision-making among school districts and local and state public health departments to balance the academic needs of students with minimizing the risk of

transmission of COVID-19. Pediatricians want to be involved in these discussions as experts on children's health and development. The national AAP recommendations for return to in-person education in schools can be found on our website at:

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

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The Southern California chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 1,500 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

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